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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

GOD AND MAN AT "NATIONAL REVIEW"

FIRST IT was Mr. Garry Wills; now it is Mr. Frank S. Meyer. Each, with an increasing pitch of righteous indignation, has excoriated he editors of The Commonweal for attacking Mr. . Brent Bozell's thesis that the West is "God's ivilization." Each, not surprisingly, is a mainstay f the *National Review,* Mr. Wills as a contribuor and Mr. Meyer as an editor. Each apparently eels that one way to preserve the West from Comnunism is to save it as well from The Commonweal.

Mr. Meyer, in a column in the *National Review* October 7) titled "Principles and Heresies," reeats many of the points made by Mr. Wills in is recent "Letter to the Editor" in these pages October 20). "But the issue is wider," says Mr. Meyer, than the question of the value of Western ivilization. "Commonweal," we are told, "drove knife to the heart of any man who, recognizing he fearful potentialities of modern warfare, is onetheless willing to stand up and fight for his ountry and his civilization."

The issue, he informs us, is not one of "modrate preferences between one civilization and nother." On the contrary, ". . . Communism, in ctual and objective fact, does represent an abolute black, and the West as a civilization is *in s essence* as close to an absolute white as is ossible in the subdued light which illuminates is imperfect world."

Conceding that " 'to enlist God' for a human id would be immeasurably blasphemous," he asks ut what if God has enlisted us, through the heriige of our long history and His revelation of good nd truth, to resist to the utmost, to bend our very energy, to destroy, an incarnate evil?"

Mr. Meyer's answer to his question is that only belief that the God-chosen West is acting acording to the will of God "can strengthen and justify us against the hazards of these fearful times." For only the West "has seen this sentient world as reflecting and embodying, however imperfectly, issues of transcendent significance." The "Liberal Catholics," he says, have to be reminded "that this is a sacramental, not a Manichean world."

THE ODD THING about Mr. Meyer's attack is that he comes perilously close to adopting a Christian liberal's point of view to defend a conservative nostrum. It is the Catholic liberal who has always argued that this is a sacramental world; who has argued, for instance, that the social order ought to be informed by norms of Christian justice. It is the Catholic liberal who has argued, against the conservative reverence for the *status quo,* that this "sentient world" embodies "issues of transcendent significance."

But Mr. Meyer is, in the end, safe from the charge of liberalism. For, having asserted his sacramental outlook, he in effect takes it all back by characterizing Communism as all black and the West as almost pure white. This sounds to us suspiciously like the political counterpart of the Manichean doctrine that there are two absolute principles in the world, a principle of light and a principle of darkness.

It is precisely our sacramental commitment which keeps us from accepting such a dualism. That Communism is a very great and dangerous evil is perfectly clear to all Christians. What we oppose categorically is the conservative attempt to turn the struggle of free men throughout the world against Communism into a struggle only for the preservation of Western values.

With equal vehemence we deny that the West has any "transcendent value" in the eyes of God—the God who made a Middle-Eastern tribe His

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chosen people, the God whose only-begotten Son was a Middle-Eastern Jew. We find it impossible to see how anyone can look upon the West "as close to an absolute white"—that West which, conservatives forget, was the spawning ground of modern materialism, secularism, and Communism.

Mr. Meyer finds it "disconcerting" that, as Catholics, we should oppose a deification of the West; that we should refuse to oppose Communism solely for the cause of Western civilization. It is precisely because we are Catholics—members of a universal, not a Western Church—that we oppose the conservative reading of the Communist menace.

Communism is not just a threat to Western values, it is even more a threat to human values and human dignity. It is a threat to all men everywhere. The Church to which we belong has not called for a "holy war" in defense of the West. The Church, in its formal condemnations of Communism, has said little or nothing about the West: its sole concern as a universal Church present in all civilizations is with the preservation of Christian and human values wherever they may be found; with the defense of man wherever he may be found.

No, we are not the ones, to use Mr. Meyer's dramatic language, who are driving a knife into the heart of men willing to die for their countries and civilizations. Exactly the opposite is the case. To reduce the menace of Communism to a menace to the West alone is to drive a knife into the heart of the vast number of Africans, Orientals and Indians who are ready to fight and die for their civilizations.

Communism is a danger to free men everywhere in the world, to Christian values in all lands, to human dignity from one end of the earth to the other. For the Church or for us to present this confrontation with evil in any other terms would be nothing less than a betrayal of non-Western men and the civilizations they hold dear. The Church has never been willing to condone such a betrayal; neither are we.

CENSURE AT THE U.N.

UNLESS later reactions reverse the tide, the United Nations has been further weakened at a time when it is acutely in need of rebuilding its strength. The recent sudden and overwhelming vote to censure the speech of the delegate from South Africa constitutes a blow at U.N. prestige at a moment when the organization is struggling to establish a new administrative head.

For the African delegates who succeeded i rushing through the unprecedented formal censur of a delegate's speech there were extenuating cir cumstances. Since South Africa's racial policies ha already been criticized or condemned in U.N. resc lutions eleven times, little could be expected c another similar move. Moreover, the group the U.N had dispatched to Southwest Africa to investigat the extension of *apartheid* to the Republic of Soutl Africa's mandate there had been refused entry. Ye here was South Africa, in the person of its Foreig Minister, presenting its strict segregationist policie for admiration, and just as forcefully and in a righteous tones as ever.

It is difficult for Americans whom Mr. Khrush chev and his compatriots have so often vilified be fore the U.N. to appreciate the degree of sens tivity of the African delegates. Violence and ir sult would appear to be a predictable element i debates between nations in a world rent by colonia upheaval and the cold war. Yet certain passage in Mr. Louw's speech must have had an extremel provocative impact upon the African delegates. Hi emphasis on the primitive character of present-da Bantu civilization, the illiteracy and wretched liv ing conditions in the lands of his special adve saries, Liberia and Ethiopia, and of the newly independent African states, and their need to ballc by animal symbol must have been particularly ir furiating.

But why was there no opposition from U.N delegates with democratic traditions to a resolutio which sets so bad a precedent for the maintenanc of freedom of speech? Opposition to *aparthei* and sympathy for the Africans' feelings (and hope of winning their favor and future votes), shoul hardly have blinded these delegates to the difficu ties they were setting up for future U.N. contrc versies. Adlai Stevenson's later criticism of the resc lution, and the haste with which it was adopted, wa solid enough, but that was about all the criticisr that was heard.

In any parliamentary body a certain amount c reciprocal back-scratching is inevitable. In th U.N., however, America's delegates could well sul ordinate the currying of favor to another, mo far-reaching consideration: the interests of th U.N. itself, for that organization is the hope c the world's smaller nations. Just as the Soviet Unio has cast itself as that international body's chi enemy, with its "rule or ruin" formula, so th United States might seek support for its own pol cies primarily by standing forth as the U.N. greatest champion and defense.

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SHELTER MORALITY

THE FALL-OUT SHELTER furor continues to grow. Home handymen all over the country are embarking on dig-it-yourself projects, and the shelter construction business is enjoying a big (you should excuse the expression) boom.

Certain moral questions in connection with the home shelter are also the subject of great public interest. It has come to light, for example, that many of those who have built family shelters have thoughtfully laid in a supply of weapons—including, in some cases, tear gas and machine guns—to drive away improvident neighbors who may besiege the shelter in the event of nuclear attack. Inevitably, the morality of such action has been commented on by a number of clergymen, most notably, perhaps, the Rev. L. C. McHugh, S.J.

Father McHugh, a former professor of ethics who is now an associate editor of *America*, shocked and scandalized a great many Americans when he wrote in *America* and repeated on a nationwide TV broadcast that it would be right, just and even prudent to repel with violence any neighbors who sought to force entry into one's family-sized shelter. One of the most outraged by Father McHugh's statements was the Right Rev. Angus Dun, Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Washington. Bishop Dun said he was appalled by Father McHugh's conclusions, which he denounced as "utterly immoral."

Bishop Dun goes too far, of course. Father McHugh's reading of the moral obligations of Christians in this matter may be distressing, legalistic, narrow, even addressed to the wrong aspect of the problem entirely, but it is also quite unremarkable as traditional moral theology. Perhaps the trouble lies with the very nature of traditional moral theology. Insofar as this discipline grew out of guide-books for confessors, it tended historically to concern itself with the minimum demands of Christian morality, emphasizing sin and guilt for purposes of confession and penance. The minimal and legalistic character of its approach to moral questions may be seen in the ancient and somewhat irreverent seminary joke which describes the moralist as *"qui tollis peccata mundi."* But even if these weaknesses in the traditional approach are admitted, we are still a long way from Bishop Dun's extraordinary cry of immorality.

Aside from this extreme and probably unconsidered remark, however, the rest of the Bishop's statements can only be commended. He went immediately to the social dimension of the problem, an aspect which traditional Catholic moralists have often tended to slight. Bishop Dun pointed out the fundamental injustice in leaving the provision of shelters to individual family capability, if only because "some families simply can't afford to build their own shelters." Going further, and stressing the positive implications of the Christian's relations with his neighbors, the Bishop said he suspected that "the kind of man who will be most desperately needed in a post-attack world is least likely to dig himself a private mole-hole that has no room for his neighbor."

Actually, we are sure, Father McHugh would not quarrel with any of these ideas. His fellow-editors at *America* expressed much the same belief when they wrote, in connection with the article which set off the controversy: "Our guess is that Father McHugh would be the first to step aside from his own shelter door, yielding space to his neighbor." What we have, then, is not a clash between different kinds of Christians so much as a clash between different approaches to questions of moral theology.

The real tragedy here, it seems to us, is that if we do not address ourselves to the problems raised by Bishop Dun, we may one day be forced to address ourselves to the problems raised by Father McHugh.

GET 'EM WHILE THEY'RE HOT

THE INDICTMENT of General Motors Corporation on charges of conspiring to prevent sales of Chevrolet automobiles through discount houses in California is a serious business, we know. Under indictment are the corporation, four Chevrolet sales executives and three Southern California dealer associations, all accused of conspiring to suppress car sales below list price. Moreover, even in this one case the penalties for each of the individual defendants may be a year in prison and $50,000 fine, if they are found guilty.

But despite the gravity of this question of corporation power, we find it hard not to be merely charmed and amused by the idea of selling automobiles in a discount house. Indeed, the only thing that enables us even to believe that it could be is the dateline on the news story, which is Los Angeles. Located as we are in the East, we have always thought Los Angeles was about as far out as you could go and still be in the country—and we were right.

Still, once you get used to the idea. . . . We wonder if those L.A. discount houses do any business by mail?

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GO CLIMB A BIRCH TREE DEPT.

ROBERT WELCH, founder and head of the John Birch Society, recently gave his first public talk in this area. I was not able to be present, but Mr. Welch's talk was covered by the local press, with a rather full account in the N.Y. *Herald Tribune,* to which I am indebted for my quotations.

Several months ago when I did a couple of columns on the John Birch Society, a few readers suggested that it was a waste of space to write about an endeavor that was so patently foolish. I won't deny that the Birch Society is foolish, but on this occasion more than fourteen hundred people turned out to cheer Mr. Welch on, and anyone who can draw fourteen hundred people has to be taken with a certain seriousness.

This time around Mr. Welch seems to have stuck rather closely to his tried-and-true line, saying little that could have been new to his followers. The policies of the United States, he reiterated, have been dictated by Communists or Communist sympathizers ever since 1941, when "Americans were sacrificed at Pearl Harbor in order to entice us into World War II" as part of a "Roosevelt scheme."

Mr. Welch believes in something that has been called "the theory of reversal." This means, if I understand it correctly, that those who appear least likely to be Communists ought to be watched with particular attention, and that actions ostensibly anti-Communist in nature may in fact be intended to help the Communists. Hence Harry S. Truman is highly suspect, despite —or even because of—the fact that he met Communist force with force in Korea.

Ignoring the obvious point that his own theory of reversal would make him the most dubious risk of all, Mr. Welch applies this notion in sweeping fashion. "Our government," he said, "has been the greatest force in the world supporting the Communist conspiracy while always pretending to oppose the advance of Communism." And in what I suppose was a special barb for the Kennedy Administration he said: "I can tell you for a fact that there are more Harvard accents in Communist circles today than can be found anywhere else in America."

All this is fascinating, in a bizarre sort of way, but to me the most interesting parts of Mr. Welch's speech were his comments on the clergy. Returning to J. B. Matthews' old theme, he charged that "the largest single bloc of Communists in America is in the Protestant clergy." As far as Catholics are concerned, Mr. Welch said: "I would say that in the Catholic priesthood only one-half of one per cent are 'com-symps' "—the Birch Society's own New-Speak for Communist sympathizers.

Here it seems to me that Catholics will have a certain amount of difficulty in deciding how they should react —or at least some Catholics will. If my mathematics are right, Mr. Welch's statement would mean that between two hundred and fifty and three hundred Catholic priests in this country are Communist sympathizers. Compared to the number of Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis who are, in Mr. Welch's book, "com-symps," this is a drop in the bucket. Clearly, then, the statement was intended as a compliment—as one more indication that Catholics are "good security risks," ideal candidates for the F.B.I., C.I.A., and what have you.

If you are a Catholic, then, you have to make a choice. If you are a Birch-symp, presumably you are proud that Catholic priests fared so well and grateful to Mr. Welch for noting the fact. If you feel the way I do, you say the whole business is nonsense, that Mr. Welch's competence in these matters is obviously *nil,* and that fourteen hundred grown people should have something better to do with their time and money than attending such meetings.

But there is more to be said than that. Mr. Welch is arrogant, but it is really no worse to label Catholic priests as Communist sympathizers than to pin the tag on anybody else for similarly foolish reasons. This is not what bothers me most.

I think I know the kind of priests Mr. Welch has on his list. They are deeply committed to the concept of international social justice, which means they favor aid to the underdeveloped areas on a scale beyond anything we have yet done. They regard Communism as a kind of heresy which took root and flourished because of the failures of Christians. They believe property is both individual and social in nature, and they deny that a man is free to do anything he likes with what he owns. They see religion as the conscience of society they refuse to go along with the idea that their own nation alone is without sin. They might prefer to be "dead rather than Red," but they don't take this to mean a call for a thermonuclear holocaust.

In short, the kind of priest I think Mr. Welch is talking about is deeply concerned with the implications of Catholicism in the temporal order. He takes Catholic social thought seriously, and he does not, for example, dismiss *Mater et Magistra* or any other papal encyclical as "a venture in triviality," to use the now celebrated phrase coined by the *National Review*. By Mr. Welch's standards, then, these priests *are* "com-symps," and the insult is not that Mr. Welch said there were so many but that he claimed there were so few.

JAMES O'GARA.

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The Case Against God

As often as God is proclaimed to be dead, just as often a fresh attack on Him is made

by BERNARD G. MURCHLAND

TWO OF THE more slippery sayings of our times are: "Let's be objective about this" and "Religion has had its day." Bertrand Russell may be aken as representative of the attitudes embodied by uch statements. In his *Philosophical Essays* he writes:

"That Man is the product of causes which had no ›revision of the end they were achieving; that his ori-;in, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his ›eliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations ›f atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of hought and feeling can preserve an individual life ›eyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all he devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday bright-ıess of human genius, are destined to extinction in the ast death of the solar system, and that the whole emple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried ›eneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these hings, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly ertain, that no philosophy which rejects them can ıope to stand."

For such minds the religious question is simply ob-olete. The case against God has been concluded, and he jury, after a long period of squabbling, has gone ıome. The most we can salvage from experience now s a kind of negative creed founded upon cosmic des-›air—although to be sure, we can still get up enough ıope to capitalize such touch words as "Man" and 'World." Rarely do men of talent fail to express their ıegative creed in language of some poetic height; they requently win Nobel prizes for doing precisely that. t may not be the best of all possible worlds, but we ıre doing quite nicely, thank you.

There is a kind of Promethean justification for such ın outlook. "I am the huntsman of the mystery, the reat resource that taught science." Nor can there be ıny doubt that rewriting the script of the gods is tempt-ng and even rewarding. The effort taps sources of human creativity that would otherwise lie dormant. But we must be careful to note that the Promethean allegory does not encompass our present situation.

When the Olympian gods died, for example, the Greeks were content to let them lie. This has never been the case with the Christian God. As often as He is proclaimed dead, as often a fresh attack upon Him is made. He has a way, so to speak, of springing back to life, which indicates, among other things, that there is a basic ambiguity at the heart of much religious discussion today.

A GOOD EXAMPLE of this is a new book by Gerhard Szczesny (*The Future of Unbelief.* George Braziller. $4.). When published in Germany in 1958 the book raised a storm of controversy and was followed up with a published debate between the author and the Catholic historian Friedrich Heer. I doubt that there will be much fuss made over it in this country. But the theme of *The Future of Unbelief* is a relevant one and furnishes an occasion to discuss some aspects and implications of the religious situation today.

Szczesny's argument is firmly entrenched in the rationalist perspective of the Enlightenment. "Anyone who without bias," he writes, in a typical plea for objectivity, "looks over the last thousand years of Western history is forced to the conclusion that Western man, the more his character matured, as he tried to penetrate the world's pattern not only in a practical way but by systematic and interpretative thought, the more he came into irreconcilable conflict with the Christian point of view. The Christian churches themselves bear eloquent witness to this state of affairs. Time and time again they resisted and charged with heresy the great spirits of the Renaissance and the periods of humanism and enlightenment."

Western man's emancipation from the spiritualistic and dualistic Christian metaphysics, argues Szczesny, is gradually coming about because of the "discovery of

ather Bernard G. Murchland, C.S.C., a regular contributor to these ages, is now doing research at the University of Buffalo.

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the unity of all being" which no longer permits us to distinguish between "this world" and "that world" but only between different gradations of a basically harmonious continuum. The humanistic orientation of this author's ethical stand is clear on almost every page.

Thus we read that "It is not a return to religion that is needed to correct immorality, but a rational insight into human nature." Or that "Confronting a human being with ethical ideas which do not refine his naturalness but rather ascribe diabolism to it must in the end lead to resignation or to cynicism." And finally that "All speculative ethical systems are unworkable in an enlightened society, since members of such a society would be prepared to follow only those directions which correspond with their own convictions, experiences and feelings. . . . Therefore all moral systems which deny that a sound basis for human behavior is found in man himself, and which undertake to propagate a view that human behavior can be effectively induced only by transcendental regulation, are actually lending support to immorality."

Two remarks might be made about Szczesny's thesis: it calls attention to a *de facto* situation and it manifests a serious myopia. Both of those points must be examined if discussion of religion is to be profitable.

IT IS BY NOW axiomatic that the Christian ethic has had singularly little direct influence on the structures of the modern world. As Louis Bouyer has said: "It is an incontestable fact that the world in which we live is no longer Christian."

The death of God, then, to take up a familiar theme, is an essential feature of our civilization and any ethic that does not take this fact into account is doomed to flounder. What Nietzsche's formula implies is less the non-existence of God than the state of values when belief in Him has ceased. Nietzsche rightly recognized that the crisis of Western civilization is to be found in the matter of unbelief.

This explains, too, Nietzsche's high regard for Socrates. In a fragment he wrote: "Socrates, to confess it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight a fight against him." When the Christian framework of values fails it is quite logical for discerning minds to turn to non-religious values and these found their highest articulation in the Greeks.

Since the advent of depth psychology it is also customary to turn to the early myths for illumination on the problem of man. In this context the atheistic humanism of our times is understandable; it provides a platform from which a certain ethics can be projected and therefore enables man to salvage something from the chaos; also, it provides a platform for effective criticism of the weakness of Christianity.

The Christian ought to know better than anyone that serious criticism of this nature is very much needed, and he should welcome it. It is clear that the Christia today is faced with a gigantic task of what we migh call "recuperation"; in the meantime he should b grateful for whatever help he can get.

One wonders here how much the course of religio would have been altered for the better had Renaissanc Christianity heeded the pointed criticisms of an Erasmu or a Nicholas de Cusa. These were men of characte and high vision who saw that a new world wa emerging and that Christianity would be immensel enriched by it. They were an intelligent and enthusiasti part of the movement of ideas, controversies, and re search brought about by the prominent scholars of th day. They were well aware of the Church's historica contributions to thought and were convinced that the were on the threshold of a creative opportunity.

This is especially true of de Cusa. His *De Concora antia Catholica,* for example, integrated the positiv elements of a number of systems and projected a sketc of the Church for the new age. His later *De Doct Ignorantia* is an even more ambitious effort to elaborat a dynamic philosophy of the reciprocal implications c what in reality seemed most contradictory. In such thinker we see an eloquent confidence in the ability c the traditional faith to absorb every positive intellectua achievement of mankind; a confidence, we might say in the perfectible power of renewal and peaceful cor quest that is one of the highest ideals of Christianity

But the magnificent efforts of both de Cusa an Erasmus were somehow lost in the turmoil of the times Both men died defeated and discouraged. But thei thought, somewhat like the patristic and medieva syntheses before them, gives Christians today a per spective for judging religious realities. And we mus be distressed when we hear it said that Christianity i a source of obscurantism, that it denigrates the humar that it prevents the full flowering of personality, that denies the unity of being, that it cannot correspond t human experience and conviction, that it does nc favor the ability of reason to elaborate ethical values– in short, when we hear what has come to be the stanc ard atheistic criticism of the Christian outlook. W realize that there is indeed some truth in all this be cause distortions always obscure, to a greater or lesse degree, the ideal. But we realize, too, that the fault i not all on one side, that somehow the critic is not see ing what is there.

IT IS in this way that books like *The Future of Un belief* manifest a disturbing myopia. A clue to th source of this myopia may perhaps be found in th Renaissance period. For it seems clear that it was i this period that we initially encounter the bifurcatio between the scientific mind and the religious minc This division was hardly a characteristic of the medieva scholastics—when Aquinas died, the University c

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Paris was more interested in his scientific treatises than his theological ones! Nor was it characteristic of the earlier Renaissance figures. But it does characterize modern thought from the time of, say, Descartes on.

We do not have to align ourselves with Pascal, who said quite simply: "Descartes is useless." But in the interests of discrimination we must recognize that modern science and philosophy progressively divested itself of religious concerns. The scientific mind predominated. Thus Gabriel Marcel writes: "I believe that the spirit of applied science is really in itself the most serious obstacle, for many perfectly candid minds, to the acceptance of the notion of religious truth."

This is not to be taken as an attack upon science. It simply indicates the confusion that necessarily sets in when religion is judged in terms of scientific categories. There are two mutual orders of reality here that are complementary insofar as they are distinct.

It is perhaps the greatest weakness of modern rationalist philosophy that it modelled itself to such a great extent upon mathematics and physics. The realm of the mind is not the same as that of the physical universe and intellectual processes must differ in each case. The habit of considering knowledge itself as a technical operation, with little regard for its interiority, leads to serious confusion.

Maritain's judgment is pertinent here: "Despite their aim to treat of sense and intelligence Descartes and Kant never came beyond the threshold, because they spoke of them in the same way as they did of other things, and had no knowledge of the realm of the mind." The divorce between the religious mind and the scientific mind is perhaps most clearly seen in Kant: science is the object of intellectual inquiry but religious matters pertain to a noumenal world and can only be established by an effort of the will.

Science, by definition, tends to give man control over a specific object. It is a manipulatory discipline and by way of hypotheses, trial and error imprints its mold upon matter. Science gives man great power and because it is of its very nature progressive it is a source of optimism and can be an occasion of pride. Risks and problems are attendant upon every scientific effort, but it tends towards a gradual elimination of mystery. This is what brings it into such sharp contrast with the religious attitude.

Religion constitutes a domain over which the subject can obtain little or no control. In Marcel's words: "If the word transcendence describes anything whatever, it must be this—the absolute, impassable gulf which opens between the soul and Being whenever Being refuses us a hold. No gesture is more significant than the joined hands of the believer, mutely witnessing that nothing can be done and nothing changed, and that he consumes simply to give himself up. Whether the gesture be one of dedication or of worship, we can still say that the feeling behind it is the realization of the Holy, and that awe, love and fear all enter into it simultaneously."

It is quite clear that when this dimension of reality is subjected to judgment within the limited categories of science it can only be found wanting. That is to say, religion is found not to be science. But this is an inadequate basis for criticizing it.

Let us take the example of psychology. On the one hand, this science shows clearly that complex dynamisms orientate man towards a harmonious and relational life. On the other hand, it portrays the grim reality of unfulfillment. Camus once said that man is the only creature who refuses to be himself; it would have been more accurate to say that man is radically incapable of being himself. Such an insight is quite in keeping with Christian revelation, and insofar as psychology, or any other discipline for that matter, illuminates this paradox and calls attention to it as a fact, it is performing a substantial service. But psychology can do no more than this. Even to ask the question "Why?" is outside its competence; the methods it employs do not as such lead to such a question.

Yet the temptation to argue from psychological observation to a philosophical or religious vision of the world is not always resisted. Nor is the injustice of such an extrapolation commonly recognized: the limiting to purely scientific categories of a reality that is infinitely more embracing. It is common, for example, to reduce the Genesis account of evil in the world to a psychological attitude. But this is to fall into the ancient trap of gnosis—which is to be guilty of a monstrous naiveté.

All idealistic forms of thought have sought, and understandably so, to escape the tension of man's gnawing inquietude in denying in one way or another its inevitable nature. Concerning this tendency, Marc Oraison writes: "All idealisms have hastened to affirm the possibility of a *human* solution to the problem; this comes in the end to denying the mysterious character of the human condition. Thus we might note that Marxist idealism believes in the solution of class warfare and economic transformation; American idealism believes in the solution of technological development and comfort; moralistic idealism believes in a solution by rigorous and immobile observation of law." And we might add that scientific idealism, when it goes beyond its proper limits, believes in a similar reduction of all things to its own dimensions and then a progressive conquest or elimination of them.

THE PROBLEM, then, becomes an inability of the religious and scientific minds to communicate. In fact, at the moment, we would seem to have no language for such communication, and this observation brings us close to the heart of the ambiguity that plagues so much religious discussion. Both religious and scientific

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mentalities are working out of different traditions. In their isolation they have lost the gift of tongues, and a large part of our work today will consist in restoring common modes of understanding.

A beginning in this effort might be made by abandoning our specialized vocabularies—what might be called our structural obscurantism—and retreating to a more neutral ground for the purpose of this work of revitalization. Buber is right when he says: "Living means being spoken to." Christians ought not be too anxious to push what they take to be their message until they hear what the other side has to say; the humanistic mind might also relinquish some of its belligerence until it makes sure what it is attacking. A good deal of listening will be required on both sides, and I do not get the impression that much of it is being done.

To me the time seems ripe for this titanic task of integration, for a form of cooperation that is not compromise. We must be grateful to the existentialists —one thinks especially of the mighty Kierkegaard— and the poets for preparing the ground for this kind of dialogue. The scientific mind cannot dismiss as irrelevant the new problems and possibilities this spade work has turned up, nor can the Christian afford to turn his back on the wealth of scientific data that is available to him. Thus the opportunity afforded at the Renaissance, by a kind gesture of history, may be at hand again.

A hint of the terrain all share in common may be found in Hans Urs von Balthasar's paradox: today nothing else is worthwhile in the world except man (because there is nothing else on which one can stake oneself)—and yet ultimately man is not worthwhile. These are the twin poles of humanistic optimism and humanistic despair. Between the two poles, as a possible synthesizing element, stands man in his need for love and solidarity.

The time has come when both Christians and non-Christians can unite on the problem of man as a question of the utmost urgency. Dialogue at this level can be the source of great enrichment and a means of building up the city of man while serving the city of God, for they are not, finally, two cities but one. We know what immense benefits science can afford to man; we know, too, that the Christian message of love is directed to the enlargement of this same creature—to the "poor, bare, forked animal" of Lear's vision.

A realistic and vital vocabulary of man, therefore, seems the logical locus of unity today, and all hands have a share in the elaboration of what we can justifiably hope to be a new human vision, enriched by the resources of religious values. Let us bear in mind that this remains a work to be done. And let us note, too, that books of the cast of *The Future of Unbelief*, while they call attention to the need of such a project, disserve the cause. Anyone has the right to disagree with Christianity; but it is simply not fair intellectual sport to ignore it.

"A NEW LIFE"

Malamud on Campus

by RICHARD M. ELMAN

WHEN Bernard Malamud won the National Book Award a couple of years back for his collection of short stories, *The Magic Barrel*, the honor was amply deserved. This collection and his short novel *The Assistant* were two scrupulous works of fiction in an otherwise sordid decade of American writing.

Although they suffered from many of the same flaws that marred the sectarian stuff in the reviews and little magazines and campus quarterlies, one felt in these books that in Malamud's fiction the homemade allegories, the occasional preciosity of language, and the use of extra-literary myths and symbolisms were superficial to the author's real concerns. Using these devices in deliberately ordinary settings like the dense urban ghettos of Brooklyn and the Lower East Side, he was able to alternate atmospheres of high hilarity and stark despair in a manner that could never be confused with naturalism or photographic realism; and, although the literary stunt seemed important, it was not all there was more to the work than mere craftsmanship.

Malamud's characteristic style of story telling was the parable; his world was so closely observed that the credible was very often wonderful while the incredible was made to seem just as real, never aberrational, so much a part of human behavior. And because he tended to work on such a small canvas—as in *The Assistant*, where the largest portion of the action took

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place inside a Brooklyn grocery store—one had the impression that the imagination was being focused and concentrated, defining relationships, being capable of vision and of ideas. Malamud's central concern then was the idea of Jewishness as a defining experience. In many of his stories conversions took place. Necessarily, his characters tended to be introspective. In those stories where the eye and the imagination were given greater freedom to wander, the writing grew correspondingly diffuse and sentimental.

Thus Malamud's was a traditional sensibility, East European, Jewish, more at home with Dostoevsky than with Stendhal. But it was equally attuned to the major themes of American life—the desire for success, failure, loss of identity, greed. For his ability to portray the weary in a way that was not in itself wearisome (but with an immense, dream-like vitality) he was praised by the Gentile and Jewish establishments alike, receiving a special note of acclaim in a supplement on American literature which the English *Times Literary Supplement* published only a year or so ago.

MALAMUD'S latest novel, *A New Life* (Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy. $4.95.), verges farther afield than most of his work to date, but it is not for this reason that it fails to be convincing. It would be easy to suggest that Malamud was out of his element in choosing to write a novel about campus life in the Pacific Northwest, but it would not be true. One cannot fault his prolific descriptions of the landscape; they are accurate and exotic, although too frequent. The trouble is that Malamud (like so many other writers who make their livings through a University job) has apparently decided to take revenge on himself for having such a part-time vocation. The result is a novel as dreary as the institution it sets out to satirize.

A New Life is another of those adultery-on-the-campus stories which turn up too often as the subject matter of on-campus writers. S. Levin, "formerly a drunkard," has been correctly labelled as a kind of latter-day *shlemiel* with Thoreau on the brain, who sets out to find a new identity for himself among the idealized simplifications of campus life at Cascadia. He bears certain resemblances to other of Malamud's searchers after identity, although he is much less burdened with his past. By the traditions of the novel in America, a relatively long-suffering and sophisticated New Yorker such as Levin should be able to handle his country cousins with ease, but Malamud reverses this pattern for satiric purposes, and Levin is gulled time and again, until finally he is forced to make a choice in which both alternatives are equally odious.

Levin, the innocent, comes to Cascadia to join the faculty because he believes teaching to be his calling. He is one of those no-longer-young men who need to make a clean break. He discovers that he has in some remote way been chosen for his job because he resembles the former lover of the wife of the Chairman of the Freshman English section—a voyeuristic egomaniac named Gerald Gilley who is also anxious to gain Levin's support in his efforts to become chairman of the entire department. Gerald's wife eventually becomes Levin's mistress, but like nearly everything else that happens in the novel, it is through no fault of Levin's. He is seduced by Pauline as he was by the landscape, by intra-departmental politics, and even by one of his own students. And all the while it remains his peculiar delusion that he has somehow mastered his own circumstances sufficiently to be engineering a kind of destiny for himself.

Obviously, such a situation is ripe with comic possibilities as a kind of parable of the enlightened man. The problem is that one is not altogether sure in this instance if the circumstances haven't been badly rigged to begin with. Are the happenings at Cascadia typical, actual, or merely freakish? Is this another form of the familiar romantic irony in which the basic element is self-pity, or does Levin really live up to the kind of man he is supposed to represent? If Malamud had been less painstaking in documenting the Main Street qualities of his campus and the arch cast of characters residing therein, and more sure about Levin, it might not have been necessary to arrange for the stealing of another man's wife to make Levin aware of his moral commitments.

What I am trying to suggest is that Malamud may have been seduced by the deceptive appearance of the world outside the New York he knows and loves, because he chose to be blind to its real possibilities. The only moment of poignancy in the novel is when Pauline discovers that Levin is not sure that he wants her permanently, but that comes so late in the narrative and is so equivocally stated that one has been tempted to abandon the freak show by then.

Can one really distinguish the men of good will from the frauds because they happen to recite *Tristram Shandy?* Is sex the only adventure left to twentieth century man? I ask myself these questions in the throes of a deep disappointment. In *The Assistant* (and to the best of my recollection in the stories in *The Magic Barrel*), Malamud's people had a much firmer grasp of reality; they were far too shrewd to be misled by their experience so drastically.

In *A New Life,* the expectations of every character are so *outré* that the realities of life have to seem absurd. Perhaps this attitude is in keeping with human attitudes in today's so-called "sexual revolution," but it also makes it easy to understand how a talented writer like Malamud can devote as much attention to bedroom eavesdropping, the mechanics of the ovaries, and the nine day cycle, as he does to the study of two people in love.

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Elementary, My Dear Watson

by JANET FISCALINI

THE QUALITY of popular crime fiction is so uncertain, its variety so nervous, and its mass so formidable that one can almost sympathize with those easy natures for whom the only question is why people choose to read about crime at all. But anyone who attempts to make distinctions is likely to begin with the mystery story.

For at least fifty years the mystery story was the best recognized, as well as the most self-conscious genre in crime fiction, and the codes and conventions which developed within it described basic popular romances. If it seems nostalgic to write about them now, it is partly because, like most popular romances, they contained much that was nostalgic at the time they were written.

Before it became respectable to read crime fiction, or fashionable to write about it, amateurs used to defend the mystery story as a mental exercise. If it was not so advanced as chess, it was more dignified than Twenty Questions, which Edmund Wilson thought he would prefer.

Those who made this defense were speaking, of course, of the pure detective, or puzzle story, which stemmed from Poe's *Tales of Ratiocination* and the Sherlock Holmes stories, and which is supposed to have found its "golden age" in the period between the two world wars. Then too, the defense must have given some clubbish comfort to those writers of the detective story who established its famous set of rules.

Generally, these rules provided that the line of the plot, the solution of the mystery, should depend entirely upon the detective's deductions from objective evidence. Accidental discoveries were ruled out. In theory, all the information available to the detective should have been made available to the reader, who competed with him in solving the problem. It followed, of course, that the mystery had to be a novel one, so that the reader should have something to puzzle over. And thus were lost the most ingenious properties of the detective; the once cherished invisible men, daggers of dry ice and myopic butlers will never come again.

In the 1940's, when critics were speculating about the continued popularity of the mystery story, Marjorie Nicholson suggested that the emphasis upon reason relieved some worry and nostalgia in the audience. Certainly the period between the two wars was not in general one of exaggerated respect for human rationality, nor of exaggerated faith in the orderliness of the world. And, in fact, the logic of the detective story (an old fashioned, scholastic logic, not a scientific one; the chemist-detective disappeared quite early) had always been as much a matter of spectacle and atmosphere as of plot structure.

Everyone remembers how Poe's detective lectured upon the nature of the intellect, and how Chesterton's Father Brown argued against magical views of the world. Throughout the great age of the detective novel, the hero continued to lecture upon his intellectual method, to explain the steps in his deductions, and to offer information on such special and nostalgic subjects as the Victorian alphabet of jewels or the history of church bells. Even in those stories which did not abide by the rules the element of spectacle persisted, and masses of readers who did not pretend to be seeking intellectual exercise read and were satisfied.

EVERYONE KNOWS that crimes are not solved in this way. The rules of the detective story defined a fantasy. And as the popularity of the romance continued, the need for new plots increased their fantasticality, until the audience grew accustomed to problems as arbitrary as the one which disgusted Raymond Chandler: if the murder was committed in the railway coach, and none of the people in the railway coach could have committed it, then each of them must have committed part of it.

Where the mystery concerned the method of the crime, solutions were likely to be even more irresponsible. One has only to recall a late case of poisoning by curare, that most scandalous of detective story poisons, which is quite harmless if ingested. And yet in this case the poison had been administered in a drink, after all; while the readers searched for the wound and weapon by which it might have been introduced into the bloodstream, they forgot that, a few pages earlier, the victim had had a tooth pulled.

This logically fantastic world implied its fantastically logical hero, and the private detective, who kept something of the social position of the amateur, appeared

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most frequently. Wonderful in his insight and in his isolation, human only in his eccentric habits and attitudes, he derived, of course, from Sherlock Holmes; that useful formula suffered every kind of variation before it was allowed to die.

It is curious, however, that as the eccentricities of Dupin and Holmes were taken from the fashions of late Byronism, those of some of their most famous successors were taken from the turn of the century dandyism which properly succeeded Byronism. Philo Vance, with his French paintings and his delicate dress, was a famous example. As his creator Van Dine hinted, Vance's attitudes were patterned on those of Oscar Wilde, who for all his paradoxes was not a simple model for a seeker after justice.

But there is not space here to consider the peculiarly vulgar artiness of certain detective stories, nor the doubtful attitudes toward crime which were implied in them. Generally, the antagonist was neither the crime nor the criminal, but the marvelous and the unexplained. The pure detective story always ended happily. And if it was necessary to show some respect for legal and sentimental conventions, it was equally necessary to establish a detached atmosphere, in which painful emotions and moral questions could be passed over.

Faithful readers remember how abruptly Doyle used to shuffle his discovered criminals offstage. Later writers followed him in the arrangement of suicides. In dismissing the emotions of the other characters, they went even beyond him.

The detective's dandyish attitudes, where they were present, gave a self-conscious naughtiness to this detached atmosphere, and a certain preciosity to that dream of opulence which is part of much popular fiction. And in those elaborate English settings the detective story found so congenial, the conventions of upper class English speech made it easy to dismiss emotions of any kind.

BY 1930 Dorothy Sayers, the author of the Peter Wimsey legend, had foreseen the end of the pure detective story, and her analyses are among the best ever written from inside the tradition. The most famous attack upon it from the outside appeared in Raymond Chandler's *Simple Art of Murder.*

Chandler's arguments were based upon an impoverished concept of realism, but his essay was important for its defense of the quite different detective romance which developed in the American pulp magazines of the 1920's. This romance, sometimes called the "action story," was made famous by Dashiell Hammett, whose novels Chandler admired and imitated.

People used to deny that Hammett's stories were detective stories at all. Actually, they were fables about justice, not about truth. Although they remained mystery stories, in the sense that the agent of the crime was discovered only at the end, the end was concerned with events, rather than with explanations, and it was arrived at by marvelous actions, rather than by marvelous reasoning. Where the deductive element was retained, it was treated perfunctorily.

In *The Maltese Falcon,* for example, no one cared how the detective proved that the treacherous woman with whom he was so treacherously involved was Archer's murderer. What mattered was the marvelous moral dilemma. In the tension of this dilemma the perfectly acceptable clue was almost forgotten. The detective talked about his code of honor, not about his deductive method, and that celebrated lecture on the code of honor was probably as important for the action story as Auguste Dupin's axioms of deduction were for the earlier type. One could see its effect in the more earnest portions of Chandler's essay, and in the plots of dozens of later novels.

It is hardly necessary to say that this concern for the possibility of justice reflected an anxiousness about political and moral corruption. Chandler himself insisted upon this, speaking of a world in which "gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels are owned by men who made their money out of brothels . . . and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers rackets."

One might have supposed from Chandler's detective, Philip Marlowe, that gangsters were the first threat to democracy. His nostalgia for an earlier, less urban, less sophisticated society appeared also in the attitude toward sexual morals. One could see it in *The High Window,* in that mawkish episode concerned with returning a Los Angeles version of the ruined girl to her decent parents in the decent Middle West. Such fluent sentimentality lay at one extreme of the dream of justice. At the other lay the vengefulness of Hammett's *Red Harvest.*

The heroes of action were quite as wonderful as the heroes of logic. Neither whisky nor beatings affected their quiet relentlessness, which enchanted one woman a chapter. And the West Coast cities in which these heroes lived had their own sort of opulence. It was characteristic of these efforts that Spade, Marlowe, and their successors should have been as socially knowledgeable as Philo Vance or Peter Wimsey. One remembers in this connection the inventories of millionaires' houses, offices, and hideouts.

Women were appraised for their social, as well as for their physical value. As collectors' items, they replaced the incunabula and the old jade. But it was a measure of the difference between the English and the American romance that these detectives were professionals, and poor, seeing the world from the underside, rather than from the top. It was also an indication of the story's sentimental sadness, and its threat.

For perhaps the deepest difference between the two

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romances followed from the fact that the odds were overwhelmingly against the action hero. He might solve the mystery, but his revenges and his rescues were rarely complete. Where the typical conclusion of the earlier type found the great man surrounded by admirers and lecturing on his method, the typical conclusion of the later one found the hero alone in his cheap office, thinking about that code of honor which was largely a code of defense.

IN THE ENDLESS demand for crime fiction, the straight detective story and the straight action story continue to appear, along with their farcical versions. But criminal sociology and psychology have provided material for at least one newer romance. There are two kinds of story. One resembles the old police novel, but is more concerned with criminal milieu than with police routine. The other depends on an identification with the criminal, and leans heavily upon textbooks of abnormal psychology.

Neither type is, properly, a mystery story. Most crime fiction has used the suspense of chase as well as the suspense of mystery, but these novels depend wholly upon chase. Their surprise endings are merely surprise endings, in the old tradition of commercial fiction.

Margaret Millar's *The Beast In View,* one of the most renowned of the psychological thrillers, is an example. The novel is written from shifting viewpoints, and the reader is given the thoughts of the mad criminal, as well as those of the other characters, most of whom know who the criminal is. There is no mystery at all. But when the criminal is caught, it turns out that the maniacal monologue represented the thoughts of another character, one of whose delusions concerned her own identity.

Such plots have been common in films and where the tricks and thrills are visual they may be more satisfying. For in the handling of narrative these writers are less responsible than Agatha Christie (a detective story fan might say that these plots are merely inversions of *Roger Ackroyd*), and in their handling of fearful atmospheres less sensitive than Mary Roberts Rinehart. Given these facts, the stream of consciousness technique is an uncertain advantage.

As the emphasis upon psychology, sociology, and apparent inevitability implies greater fear and horror, it ought also to imply greater sadness. This is what happens in the better police novels, where a tone of regret qualifies a quiet sense of duty, and the menace is indirect, being largely a matter of milieu. In the simpler police novels, and in many psychological thrillers, the criminal is simply personified danger. Everything is given up to fear, flight, and chase.

Anyone fond of crime fiction is likely to resent new romances in his regret for old ones, and the mood may color his speculations. But one wonders why we should have moved, in the last thirty years, from an almost exclusive concern with the hunter to an almost exclusive concern with the hunted.

One wonders, also, if this very conscious reliance upon a sociological, psychological concept of naturalism is not in itself nostalgic. Certainly much postwar literature has abandoned these concerns and these explanations, which in popular crime fiction must be made simple and sensational, and thus become material for a fable of sanity in some ways similar to the fables of reason and of justice.

SCHORER ON LEWIS

Babbitt and Babbittry

by DAVID LITTLEJOHN

REVIEWING Richard Ellmann's monumental biography of James Joyce last year, a British critic spoke of "the exhaustive school of American biography." This school, said V. S. Pritchett, "has not always been happy in its subjects and is frequently pedestrian in style." With Joyce, however, who wove his epics out of trivia, the massive assemblage of detail "down to the last cigarette" seemed to matter. He was, after all, a giant, one of the very few. But Sinclair Lewis?

In an ingenuous memoir in the New York *Times Book Review* called "My Nine Years' Life and Imprisonment with Sinclair Lewis," Mark Schorer, the latest of the exhaustive biographers, recently anticipated the objection. Who—he had asked himself, and as we ask—was Sinclair Lewis? The most successful hack-writer of all time, clumsy, controversial, conventional; the creator and perpetuator of grotesque cari-

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catures and clichés now embedded in the American consciousness. Or was he something more? Just ten years after its subject's death, this book is Mr. Schorer's answer, and his own excuse.

"Perhaps it is futile to approach any Lewis novel as a work of art," his biographer frankly admits. Even so, Mr. Schorer, an even better critic than chronicler, offers perceptive analyses of all the major (and minor) works—including a reading of *Elmer Gantry* that is not likely to be equalled. If *Gantry* is read today, though, or *Babbitt,* or *Main Street*—and a new combined edition seems to suggest this is the case—it is for something other than high literary merit. Sinclair Lewis was the last major social critic in American fiction, and perhaps the greatest. That we are as we are today, for better or worse, is partly the result of Lewis' sharp-etched and lasting visions of American society. Few civilizations have been granted so vivid an image of themselves. Distorted, grossly one-sided the image may have been; but that one side, the narrow, spiteful, parochial, pompous, hypocritical side of American life, we might never otherwise have been forced to see.

That there are no Lewises writing today may be simply because his kind of dramatized insight is so rare. To have it, a writer must be, as Lewis was, both wholly immersed in the "destructive element," and somehow above it: a part of all he condemns. Again, the lack may be due, as Schorer suggests, to a usurpation of the novelist's function by the "popularizing psychologists"—or even the comedians and cartoonists—who create whatever national self-images we have today. Yet the fact that no one has succeeded in displacing Babbitt or Elmer Gantry, Zenith or Gopher Prairie from the national imagination suggests that it was the genius of Lewis to crystallize *true* archetypes, essential American images; and that it was the fate of America to live up to his creations.

The story of Sinclair Lewis must also be the story of an age: of that side of the 20's and 30's that Scott Fitzgerald never knew. This background panorama of America between the wars is certainly one of the lasting values of Mr. Schorer's book. It is compounded of Socialism and Upton Sinclair; Eugene V. Debs and Lewis' "Labor Novel" (which was never written), his Clarence Darrow novel; *The Man Who Knew Coolidge; It Can't Happen Here;* Lewis in Moscow for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution; his wife expelled from Hitler's Germany in 1934. Lewis met William Dean Howells in 1916, and Norman Mailer in 1948; he failed to know few of the luminaries in between.

This is not their story, though, but that of the ugly, unhappy man from Sauk Center who fought with them all. Through Lewis' books and stories and articles, through coded childhood diaries, letters, guest lists, programs, memoirs, reviews, interviews, engagement books never before made public, Mr. Schorer doggedly tracks him down; through early years as barren in the reading as in the living, to the single dazzling decade of success, into pathetic, drunken decline. With little intrusion—perhaps too little—from the biographer, a confused and pitiful figure emerges from this mass documentation and detail.

SINCLAIR LEWIS is an unlovely picture of fame in our time. Lewis enjoyed a celebrity as had no American author before: four of his novels sold over a million copies; most became motion pictures; his associations were with all the great of the age. This picture of the bitter, denouncing critic as best-seller, of America lapping up its own poison is too obviously ironic.

Schorer shows us the monumental researches that preceded each of the major novels: taking notes for *Elmer Gantry,* Lewis read over two hundred religious books, visited two or three church services every Sunday, and, for two months in Kansas City, assembled fifteen leading clergymen in his apartment every Thursday to argue on religious topics. He wrote ferociously almost all his life, sometimes finishing a novel in a matter of months, and then hounding his publishers with his own ideas for promotion. He had long set his sights on both the Pulitzer and the Nobel Prizes he was ultimately to win, and he urged his publishers to pull all the necessary strings. His rejection of the former, when at last it was offered for *Arrowsmith* in 1926, Mr. Schorer shows to be a matter of spite and publicity. The machinations behind the sacrosanct Nobel award of 1930—the first to an American author—are equally revealing.

The award was universally unpopular among serious writers, however, and Mr. Schorer dates the long period of Lewis' decline from this historic event. The empty honor turned out to be one of the bitterest events of his life. When, the following year, Theodore Dreiser —the Nobel committee's second choice—hit Lewis in the face at a public banquet, Mr. Schorer reports (in one of his rare moments of humor), "Nothing had satisfied the public so completely since Rudy Vallee had been struck in the face with a grapefruit."

The rest of the story is one of sodden decline, of drunkenness and artistic failure, of egotism and alienation, of the everlasting search for a home and the everlasting search for friends. The noblest aspect of his marriage and loves—his first wife was flayed alive in *Dodsworth,* his second in *Cass Timberlane*—was the patient forbearance of the women involved. From his lonely schooldays he had kept lists of his "friends," pathetically crossing off the ones he lost, and he lost almost all. He changed residences scores of times, insatiably trying to establish roots, and never remaining long—obsessed by "the fallacy of elsewhere." For

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years he kept coming back to Sauk Center, returning to the people he had won his fame by vilifying: "I like the Babbitts, the Dr. Pickerbaughs, the Will Kennicotts, and even the Elmer Gantrys rather better than anyone else on earth. They are good fellows. They laugh—really laugh." But Lewis didn't. Nor could the few friends he had left. Drunken fits and stupors gave way to bitter, petulant, premature senility, and he died a ghastly, mystery-ridden death in Rome.

NINE YEARS is a long time to spend on any book. Lewis once wrote seven novels in that time. But when one considers the mountains of material Mr. Schorer had before him—he has obviously read every existing scrap that Lewis ever wrote, and Lewis never stopped writing—the time seems less surprising. Schorer's method is that of the objective, comprehensive chronicler. He presents his material, selected from these roomsfull of data—doubtless there could have been volumes more—in a lucid, sequential, item-by-item order, unbiased and essentially uncolored. The man who comes to life is the creation not of the biographer, but of his own words, his own compulsive actions, the comments and analyses of those who knew him best. This is not Schorer on Lewis, but Lewis.

Which means that the biography will be interesting reading only so far as Lewis's life itself was interesting, for there is here no intervening hand to brush away the dust. As much of Lewis's early life was bleak, so is much of the first part of the book. So too, when his life was vicious or disgusting or depressing: "Since this book is attempting completeness, considerations of 'taste' must be put aside." ("Completeness" itself, sometimes, can be carried too far. Not to have known that Lewis was Member Number 12157, Branch One, New York Local of the Socialist Party; or that fire broke out in Helicon Hall "at 4:14 on the morning of Saturday, March 16, 1907, Upton Sinclair's recollection to the contrary" would not greatly have lessened the experience of the book.)

Objectivity and comprehensiveness, however, are perhaps to be sought above all in a first and definitive life. (The omission of specific source references for the thousands of quotations becomes on this account somewhat surprising.) In this book, to be sure, objectivity and comprehensiveness do not imply dullness. When Mr. Schorer "nods in" to the book, and he frequently, politely does, his company is to be prized. He shows a noble restraint in the face of the more grotesque situations, but every few pages he lets slip the slightest drop of irony or sympathy or bemused opinion, at no real loss to objectivity, and at great gain to the reader. His historical summaries and psychological analyses are generally unimpeachable; and the neatly interwoven literary judgments are among the finest things in the book. The *Elmer Gantry* chapter, as I say, is superb: but a similar total appreciation of each major and minor work is included in turn, drawn out of the biography around it. He detaches the essential qualities of "the Lewis novel," and analyzes, crucially, Lewis's own disposition to the characters he creates. In striking and imaginative comparisons, he sets Lewis against each major author he meets, taking particular pains to place him against the rising 'New Wave'—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, and Faulkner.

When on the motivations for Lewis's compulsive affairs, his lists of "deleted" friends, and—of all things—the beauty of Duluth, Mr. Schorer rises to unexpected and captivating flights. And we can all but hear a breath of relief in the last three chapters, the freest, most imaginative writing of the book . . . coming home, after nine long years! Scattered events of this last lonely year, pried out of the unyielding memory of a mysterious secretary, are set amid a fantastically-wrought description of Lewis's final home:

"Across the foyer was a sitting room about the size of the drawing room, with more white-enamel walls and ornamental gilt embossments, a crystal chandelier large enough for a theatre lobby, a white-enameled grand piano that required a ten-piece orchestra in white tuxedos and a singer like Ella Fitzgerald to complete it, another even larger portrait of a lady in yards and yards of extravagant chiffon gown. . . ."

This perhaps is Schorer the novelist taking over, but it is also, alas, the sort of biography more pleasurable to read. It is biography, perhaps, not of the "exhaustive"—and exhausting—American school, but of the mellowed "British" school, the school of imagination, of fine writing and donnish wit. But the facts, after all, must come first, and Mr. Schorer is to be honored for his efforts and devotion above and beyond the call.

BIDDEN

Bidden to give up the world for thee,
Long have I lingered, Lord, against thy will,
Breakneck bound by dark desire still,
The mind's eye blinded by the flesh of me.
Ah, Lord, kept from all clear thought of thee
By memories my old remorse can't kill,
Deepening pits no fiery flesh can fill
Because they tunnel to the soul's broad sea.
But when these flames have feasted and have gone
Leaving an ashen heart to nights of shame,
Then seize upon the ruins that remain
And sunlike brighten my dark skies to dawn,
Kindle again this once burnt flesh to flame
That like a phoenix I may mount, though slain.

DAVID M. ROGERS.

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THE SCREEN

NEVER HIT A WOMAN WITH A CHILD

WORDSWORTH wrote "Intimations of Immortality" some hundred and fifty years ago. Now a line from his ode turns up as the title of a movie about the sex life of high-school kids. I'm not quite sure what this proves, but I'm not sure what "Splendor in the Grass" is trying to prove either—unless it's that unwise parents make their confused offspring more confused than ever. Perhaps producer-director Elia Kazan, who persuaded playwright William Inge to write this original screenplay from a true story of the twenties, didn't have anything more in mind than to present a case history. The case he and Inge come up with is rather muddled, but Kazan has presented it in some remarkably effective cinema that is far superior to the story line, and the acting is excellent throughout.

As the ill-fated young couple, Natalie Wood and newcomer-to-the-films Warren Beatty bring to their portrayals a quality of winning freshness that makes their sad tale all the more poignant. Unfortunately this tale, with its contrived and bizarre themes, becomes less and less believable as it progresses. The girl's mother insists that sex is a nasty thing and "no nice girl has those feelings about a boy." The boy's self-centered, millionaire father, with ambitious dreams, won't let his son marry until after he finishes Yale; as for sex, he suggests the boy take up with floozies. These two roles, in all their distastefulness, are superbly played by Audrey Christie as the girl's ignorant mother, and Pat Hingle as the boy's repulsive father.

Handsomely photographed (but not in Kansas which is the setting for the story), "Splendor" is a curious mixture of realism, sensationalism and fancy. In spite of flashes of truth, the film's excesses detract from its credibility. The girl, madly in love with the boy and seeing him carry on with other girls, gets tied up in knots, has a nervous breakdown and is sent to an asylum. The boy's sister, unloved by their father, goes haywire in orgies of drinking and sex. And the boy, who flunks out of Yale, marries a pretty nobody. If the film has any conclusions about a mode of behavior for young people, it fails to make them. Indeed, most of its best scenes concern the irresponsible parents.

No doubt Elia Kazan's picture merits consideration—even if only for the controversy it will stir up. But it's too bad that it didn't assume the responsibility it finds lacking in parents. And it is too bad that it didn't have more scenes like the touching finale in which the boy and girl meet again years later—realizing they have little in common but the past, "though nothing can bring back the hour of splendor in the grass."

THIS MUST be let's-run-down-parents week. "The Explosive Generation," which starts with a series of incidents connected with high-school kids on an all-night party, also goes out of its way to present the young people's parents and elders in the worst possible light.

Stanley Colbert, who produced this low-budget picture in black-and-white, TV's Buzz Kulik, who directed his cast without many shadings in character, and Joseph Landon, who wrote the script in black-and-white, base their story of a student strike on a fracas that actually happened. When the parents discover that the senior class's well-liked teacher (William Shatner) is going to discuss sex and how far a girl should go to retain her popularity, they rise in indignation and demand an end to all this nonsense. The kids are furious when the teacher is suspended. They start their strike at a rally and later continue it after returning to school by giving their teachers the silent treatment.

No doubt young people should be taught to stand up for their beliefs; but when one reads almost daily in the papers of student riots and brawls, one wonders if students' immature ideas don't need a little straightening out. If "The Explosive Generation" means to help straighten them out, it might have portrayed the parents and school and police authorities as mature people of at least some judgment instead of the dopes and bullies and fools and opportunists all these elders, except Shatner, are. The film is as irresponsible as the silly parents it displays with their misguided adolescents.

AS ELVIS PRESLEY'S mother in "Blue Hawaii," Angela Lansbury gives a brilliant performance as a transplanted Southern nitwit who won't let baby grow up. When Elvis returns to his parents' home in Honolulu after serving in the army, mama smothers him in kisses as she welcomes her "boy home from the war"—meaning, without doubt, the War between the States, but knowing full well he was drafted for just a two-year, peacetime hitch. It's no wonder Elvis rebels against his parents—what with his mother behaving like a Southern belle with social ambitions and his father (Roland Winters), although a regular guy, insisting that Elvis join him in the pineapple business. Elvis's sweetheart, a very pretty half-French-half Hawaiian girl played by Joan Blackman, reminds him "We're not our families, we're ourselves," and guides him into the tourist business, which, as you may imagine, is very profitable in Hawaii.

"Blue Hawaii" doesn't have much in the way of plot, but it has some lovely shots of Oahu and Kauai as Elvis plies his trade. It also has a plethora of song-and-dance numbers, well handled by Elvis and a variety of Hawaiian talent, and some quite amusing satire. Presley, who no longer behaves as if he were

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God's gift to teenagers, is remarkably adept at the comedy stuff and isn't even averse to kidding while putting over a song. The young man shows signs of growing up—in spite of the parents he was stuck with this time. PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

THE STAGE

STRAIGHTFORWARD MYSTIFICATION

DURING THE FIRST half-hour or so of Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker" I found myself thinking that this might be one of those revelatory occasions in the theater when something entirely new and liberating takes place; I remembered my feelings on that evening in my youth when I had seen "Six Characters in Search of an Author" for the first time, and I thought of that wild opening-night, full of dislocation, light, stupor and derision, when "Waiting for Godot" made its apple—car—tipping appearance among us. But though "The Caretaker" remained original, true and substantial to the end, the sense of astonishment, of sitting in on a major breakthrough of the dramatic imagination, left me after a while and nothing could bring it back.

I hated to see it go. "An interesting soup but not a great soup," the child in the cartoon declares, and defines our unrest; we go on tasting every dish in hopes that the great thing will turn up. Still, we are told that of all the arts the theater has the most problematic standards of absolute triumph, and with that in mind I left "The Caretaker" comforted by the probability that there will not be many superior plays this season, nor any whose acting, staging and direction so faultlessly conform to its substance.

To judge from both the response of the audience on the night I was present and the published comment so far, "The Caretaker" has been received here with a maximum of pleasure and a minimum of understanding. In Pinter's native England the same thing seems to be true. On both sides of the ocean his theatricality is praised, people speaking of "tension," "grotesque humor" and "subtle characterization," at the same time engaging in labored attempts to find parabolic or allegorical interpretations for the mystifying activities that go in in his dramas. They would do better to believe him when he protests that his plays, in intention at least, are direct, unsymbolic and crowded with actuality.

Which is of course not to say that "The Caretaker" is a straightforward drama. It is in fact an antidrama, or at least an anti-literary one, stemming, as so much that is interesting seems to these days, from Beckett, and with a more remote ancestry in the novels of Dostoievsky, Joyce and Kafka (another ubiquitous presence in the contemporary theater of wit, dream, daring and anguish). There are not many clues to behavior, almost no psychologizing, few explanations and only the most tenuous and static of denouements. And the language moves from deliberate banality, to parody, to the utmost simplicity of denotative speech, which is itself, of course, a parody of traditional stage rhetoric.

In one filthy room of a lower-depths London rooming-house three men enact a charade of misunderstanding, thwarted love and appetite, and hopeless attempts at escaping from isolation. Davies, a tramp, the scurviest tramp imaginable, is befriended by Aston, who owns the house together with his brother Mick and who has vague plans for renovating it. From the beginning we are aware that there is something the matter with Aston; his speech is slow and dreamlike, he either stands gazing upon some unseen vista or tinkers endlessly with a broken clock, though he also speaks feelingly of a shed he is building with "good wood" in the yard.

Davies, on the other hand, is very much there, an incarnation of greed, envy and absurd pride, filled with the empty belligerence of the dispossessed and entirely ungrateful for Aston's kindness in taking him in. And Mick is also there; he is active, loquacious and strangely malevolent, baiting the tramp with outbursts of savage irony that are in extreme contrast with Aston's demeanor. The "action" of the play consists in the interplay among the three, in Aston's ultimate regretfully taken decision that Davies' presence is intolerable and in the latter's reduction to a condition of supremely naked, piteous need to be allowed to stay on.

It isn't hard to see why "The Caretaker" should have been interpreted as a morality play in which Davies is Everyman, Aston Christ and Mick the devil. But it won't do; the characters are far too actual for that, the play has too many incongruities and excrescences, there is too much movement beneath the surface. I think it far more to the point to consider the three men as constituting a triad roughly on the order of the brothers Karamazov—the major faculties of man's being, appearing as a triple irruption from the depths of the dramatist's imagination. And like Dostoievsky's brothers the characters of Pinter's drama are not therefore symbols but mysterious new creations; their reality is self-contained, so that they do not so much indicate meaning as irradiate it.

What then is wrong, or rather, less than magnificently right about "The Caretaker"? The final image is achieved: of unbearable loneliness, of war in the members of the body, and yet also of a persistent blind movement toward communion and authentic life. Un-

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der Donald McWhinnie's direction the cast, especially Donald Pleasence—who makes of Davies a superlatively realized figure for whom our compassion is as great as our repugnance—contributes everything necessary and adds nothing superfluous.

And yet there is a weakness somewhere, an ultimate failure of *establishment,* a final deprivation of fullness, of the sense of inevitability and of the vision of reality freshly apprehended. It seems to me that all this is due not to Pinter's untraditional dramaturgy but to the fact that he is not untraditional enough. That is to say, his play is too much a thing of jarring styles, characterizations and motivations, not a consistent piece of relentlessly exhibited discovery, such as we find true in the work of Beckett and in most of Ionesco.

Davies is too full-bodied against Aston's incorporeal virtue and Mick's free-floating intellect. Anecdote too frequently breaks the mood of non-specific, non-contingent pity and alarm (there is a long monologue by Aston in which he describes an operation performed on him years before; it was in the nature of a lobotomy and it helps explain his current behavior but at the same time partly reduces him to a case history). And finally there is the existence of the parody, the irony and the inversion of accustomed attitudes, not as the very substance of the play but as discrete fragments separated by moments of direct, and therefore disconcerting, experience.

I would like to see Pinter more not less "absurd," to see him relinquish his anchors in the kind of truth which says what it is itself so that it resists new shapes and expression. (*At the Lyceum.*)

RICHARD GILMAN.

OF NOTE

"BELIEF AND THE CRITIC"

IN THE Summer number of the quarterly journal *Renascence,* (Catholic Renascence Society, Inc., Mount Mary College, Milwaukee 10, Wisconsin. $4.), Samuel Hazo discusses the delicate task of the Catholic literary critic. The following is a substantial excerpt from Mr. Hazo's article, which is titled "Belief and the Critic":

Assuming . . . the validity of his scholarship, and his mastery of critical "tools," I suggest that the Catholic critic's *first task* is to imbue his explicative effort with a sensitivity to the work's values in the non-dogmatic sense. He must permit his sensibility as a Catholic to suffuse and direct his skill as an explicator. Such an alliance eschews the error of dogmatism, which in effect paralyzes criticism, and at the same time permits Catholicism to make possible for a critic a more comprehensive approach to literature and its elucidation. But the full significance of the relationship between Catholicism and literary criticism exceeds the problems of approach and explication. Even after a critic has suspended his disbelief and entered into the life of a literary work in order to understand it as completely as possible, even though he remain faithful to his ideal of comprehensiveness and prevents his beliefs from prejudicing or dogmatizing his critical sensibility, he is still faced with the matter of evaluation. In effect, he is still confronted with the problem of relating literary value to absolute value.

Of course, the purely formalistic critic would not readily concede that relating literary value to absolute value is a matter of critical responsibility. For him, the critic's final judgments are aesthetic. But this would be a satisfactory position only if the critic were considering the literary equivalent of carpet patterns. Moreover, the nature of literature itself, to say nothing of the nature of language itself, belies the formalistic solution as complete. I make this statement in complete awareness of Herbert Read's recent warning that a critic should not indulge in "moral" judgments. It is important to remember in this regard that the literary work is actually a vision, indeed a vision of the world through the very subjectivity of the artist, to paraphrase Maritain.

The character of a vision such as this one, its nature as well as the skill with which it is expressed, cannot help but command the attention of the critic in an evaluative sense. Just as the beliefs of the artist condition and shape his vision of what is significant and less significant in the world, so do beliefs enter into a critic's evaluation of that vision after he has fully understood or even while he is understanding it. It not only contradicts the character of the poetic vision but also the denotative and connotative character of language to say that literature in the language of Eliseo Vivas is "merely formal structure devoid of embodied meanings and values." The purely formalistic solution is incomplete because it belittles the possibility of evaluating vision in any but a partial sense, and few critics have been more lucid in their castigation of this shortcoming of formalism than has Nathan Scott in his recent lecture at the Columbia University English Institute:

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"For . . . great literature does, in point of fact, always open outward to the world, and that which keeps the universe of poetry from being hermetically sealed off from the universe of man is the poet's vision that it incarnates, of species and horizons, of cities and men, of time and eternity. This is why those modern theorists who tell us that the literary work is merely a verbal structure and that its analysis therefore involves merely a study of grammar and syntax —this is why they so completely miss the mark. They forget that writers use language with reference to what they know and feel and believe and that we can therefore understand their poems and novels only if we have some appreciation of how their beliefs have operated in enriching the meaning of the words that they employ.

The 'poem-in-itself,' in other words, seen as merely a structure of language, is simply a naked abstraction, for the real poem, the real novel, is something that we can begin to appropriate only as we seek some knowledge of the context of belief and the quality of the vision out of which it springs and with reference to which the words on the printed page have their fullest and richest meaning."

The implications of Scott's statement are that works of literature are more than interesting syntactical creations and that poems, novels and dramas are not constructed of words as houses are constructed of so many identical and carefully positioned bricks. Thomas Pollack has stressed the same truth by saying that literature is characterized by "evocative symbolism." Springing as it does from what Maritain has perceptively called moments of "creative intuition" in the artist, a work of literature reveals a world transmuted through the artistic imagination. What results is not merely a communication, but a vision, a "verbal icon," a "concrete universal." It seems a truism to say that words have semantic as well as syntactical signification, but this is essentially what refutes the formalist. Words not only *are*. They reveal, they suggest, they mean, and in their revelation, their suggestion and their meaning, they often project the critic beyond the realm of explication and into the domain of evaluative judgment. . . .

In brief, then, for a critic to apply only ontological or purely formalistic criteria to what springs from the deepest recess of the spirit of man and whose significance is dependent upon the value of the "conception of reality presented" is to belittle an important dimension of artistic expression.

THE MASS DESERTED

From "Realta Vince Il Sogno"

By Carlo Betocchi: Translated by I. L. Salomon

In a backward hamlet,
in a hamlet of the mountain,
under the shadow of a beech,
a church is complaining;
  a sloping dark street
  takes one to its walls.

The bell has sounded,
not a man appears as yet;
gathered in the church square
they quarrel over a guessing game of fingers;
  and juvenile delinquents
  fling sharp cries.

The priest with his yellow stole
remains in the melancholy church;
an inharmonious light
flutters from here and there;
  terribly dark,
  everything disappears before you.

That poor woman
who is dispirited and kneeling
at the altar of the Madonna
and that other one in despair:
  wretchedly dispersed
  under universal shadows.

In the middle of the church
there are three girls in white
whose exhausted singing
flies toward the bare beams;
  the priest does not answer
  those immaculate souls.

But Christ Jesus willed
two children at the foot of the altar;
he took two sad clods
and made them breathe;
  and they were two babies;
  they were naked as angels.

They who play
on the marble steps
are miraculously touched
by the rays of a beautiful calm sun;
  The Mass without men
  lives in Corpus Domini.

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Literacy, Wit and the Courage of Tradition

WHEN FOUND, MAKE A VERSE OF. By Helen Bevington. Simon & Schuster. $4.50.
IN THE STONEWORKS. By John Ciardi. Rutgers Press. $3.50.
WEEP BEFORE GOD. By John Wain. St. Martin's Press. $2.95.
SOLSTICES. By Louis MacNeice. Oxford Press. $3.50.

By BETTE RICHART

THERE IS NO doubt that Helen Bevington has done more to make culture attractive (without, bless her, ever deteriorating into coyness) than any living writer. Her new book reminds us of what our reading notes should be like: random but essential reflections on everything that can happen to great readers in the course of a day. Reading is what chiefly happens, of course—and in Mrs. Bevington's case, teaching, meeting poets, and now and then traveling (without interrupting the reading unless crucially necessary).

The range of her mind matches her perspective. Now it seems to me that this balance, this almost visual art of proportion, is really the soul of wit, rather than brevity. She herself illustrates the point with a charming anecdote. William Blake, looking at some sketches of Constable's, exclaimed, "Why, this is not drawing but inspiration!" Constable replied quietly, "I meant it for drawing." It is enough to say of the romantic excess which is always the temptation of tyros—in both art and feeling. However, abstraction too is a temptation, as we are warned when Mrs. Bevington remarks of Marianne Moore, "She is understandably fond of the panda and jerboa—but she has not written about human love." In our beatnik century, the caution against extremes can hardly be overdone.

John Betjeman is the poet whose mind this lady's mind most resembles: their concern is often with things not usually considered the province of poetry (architecture, mottoes, tennis games), yet they never seem trivially eccentric. The concept that "ideas are everywhere" is an axiom of literacy, and so is Thoreau's advice, "Do what you love"—a motto safe and effective only for men of good will. They are, after all, about the only audience left for poetry—even Allen Ginsberg's.

All the books being considered here are protests against the merely zany, as poetry certainly ought to be (Mrs. Bevington is not afraid to mention the moon or swans, or indeed any classical symbol that occurs to her), yet only one of these collections—MacNeice's—is written in an idiom too tired to command attention. Mr. Ciardi's new book, "In the Stoneworks," is certainly his best, a reassuring thing for a writer to know. His title poem is somber and memorable, brief as it is, unabashedly reviving the theme of "Ozymandias." "Look on the stoneworks, ye mighty, and despair," he seems to be saying, and the image of the statues, statues of centuries before, and by implication, statues of centuries to come, is terrible in its stillness. Its relevance to the age of fall-out is clear enough, but as for poets, they've survived fall-out from the start. Ciardi is preoccupied with the unsleeping yet unknowing image—image in the literal sense of statues and dolls. "Their eyes wide open, forever, while all the children slept." It is an effective and, as he uses it, an original device.

There are minor derivations from great poems; this is inevitable, since poets have to read a lot in order to become poets. In "Dialogue," a man says to the mirror, "I shall part my hair, I suspect, as I always do. Or maybe another way." The echo of Prufrock here all but obliterates the original identity. And in "Tick," the librarian says, "Time is this library card./You may sign for some but not for all./Return what you've borrowed when due." Overtones of "The Castle" and "The Consul," with God Himself the Chief Bureaucrat, are unmistakable here. But these are small flaws, outweighed by the successful section called "Voices," soliloquies of great men from Leonardo to Byron. Leonardo defines his purpose as "to find my mind's eye in the world, and give my hand in marriage"; Hamlet inquires, "And shall I rise to judgment or a curtain call?" The men behind all the voices are dimensional, have risen from the page.

Day Lewis has named wit as one of the necessities of poetry, and Ciardi's wit is at its best in the sweet-sour poem "On Meeting Miss B." Miss B. is an unfortunate woman poet, to whom Ciardi found nothing to say "in honor of his own profession which is in praise of the power of the enlarging word," since after all words have not enlarged *her* much. It is a very endearing funny poem, and reminded me of Cummings, but not in a derivative sense. "Dogmatism," intended to be funny, doesn't come off nearly as well.

The young critic John Wain, whose articles in the English magazine *Encounter* are consistently quotable and amusing, has written an eloquent slim volume in "Weep Before God." He is traditional in technique, contemporary in feeling (as a good critic should be: can you imagine Allen Ginsberg, to make him an example once again, writing on Catullus or Donne or Matthew Prior?). Literate in the best sense, he has fused his reading and his talents successfully. "To live is to go forward and forget," "The artist is not finer than others, he is stranger," "We only utter what we lightly know," are good lines in good poems. "A Boisterous Poem About Poetry," the really excellent "A Song About Major Eatherley" (the hero who dropped the second bomb on Nagasaki and then went mad) offer more than a hope for poetry; they offer a hope for criticism—which needs it more.

Louis MacNeice, once the most important poets on the list under discussion, has cooked up some thin gruel in this last; there is little to

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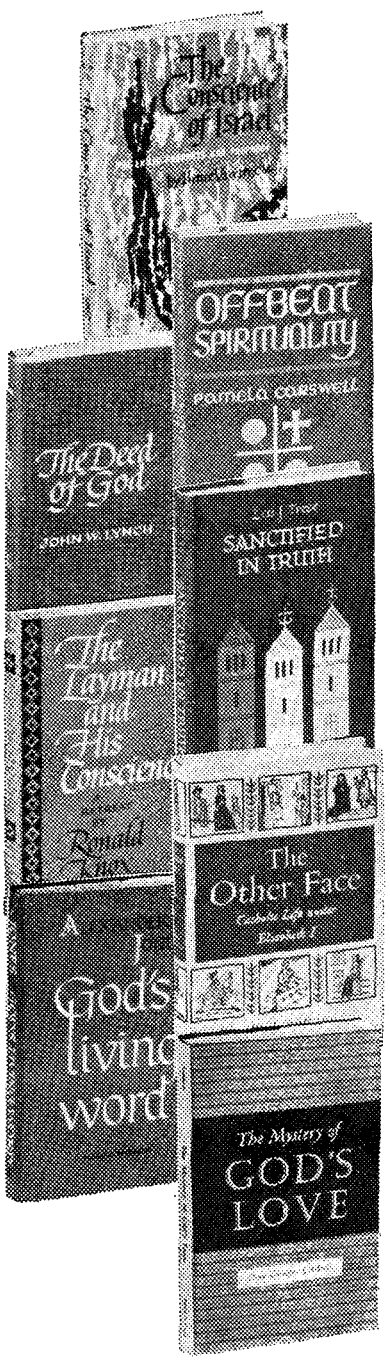

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say of it. There is one good poem of the Auden school, and one very bad one, which actually contains the unblushing lines: "And yet whatever drinks are downed/Someone has got to pay for the round." In America, such sentiments are more convincingly developed in musical comedy.

None of these books will be of permanent importance, but they have literacy, wit and the courage of their own traditions in common—a harder thing sometimes than the courage of convictions. Even Mrs. Bevington's irresistible collage of prose and poetry can hardly stand beside her crystal poems alone; even Mr. Ciardi will have much more to say later.

For despite the shared graces of those accomplished poets, there is also a shared lack: the language is not dense enough (not one of them could coin an outrageous, mysterious, true phrase like "altarwise by owl light"; they lack Empson's types of ambiguity, in which Dylan Thomas was so rich). The problem is a difficult one; how to assimilate patterns, know what they are for without exclaiming to Christ about it, and yet be a wild one, "To hear the music of the hoodlum in the night and see the flower in his hat." It is the perpetual problem of the artist. He must not be ill at ease in the formality of his imaginary gardens, nor must he recoil from the toads in them. And in passing, he must speak to strangers in their own language; the gift of tongues would help!

Only a handful of the prime movers have quite contrived to do all these things, of course, but we must, as long as they are there, weigh the others against them . . . just because, like Everest, they are there. Bloy says the only sadness is that of not being a saint, but Strachey is right too, in saying "It is almost always disastrous not to be a poet." It is good that even a few have survived the brass and cymbals of our time.

What Is It Like To Be a Negro?

BLACK LIKE ME. By John Howard Griffin. Houghton Mifflin. $3.50.

By BRUCE A. COOK

IT IS DIFFICULT to know exactly how to feel about this book, and the difficulty springs, I think, from its very nature. *Black Like Me* is novelist John Howard Griffin's report on six weeks in his life (November 7th to December 14th, 1959) which he spent traveling through the Deep South disguised as a Negro.

For years, he tells us, he had been haunted by the question of what the Negro in the Deep South feels. "What is it like to experience discrimination based on skin color, something over which one has no control?" Any white man in America with the slightest sensitivity to the human condition must at one time or another have asked himself such a question: What is it *like* to be a Negro? Griffin decided to find out:

"How else except by becoming a Negro could a white man hope to learn the truth? Though we lived side by side throughout the South, communication between the two races had simply ceased to exist. Neither really knew what went on with those of the other race. The Southern Negro will not tell the white man the truth. He long ago learned that if he speaks a truth unpleasing to the white, the white men will make life miserable for him.

"The only way I could see to bridge the gap between us was to become a Negro. I decided I would do this."

Griffin went to New Orleans where he consulted with a dermatologist who reluctantly agreed to change the color of his skin through a series of drug treatments. He then passed successfully into the Negro world, but his experience "as a Negro" cannot easily be summarized. They range from the terrifying (being hounded down a New

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Orleans street by a white tough who threatened to beat up Griffin simply because he thought him a Negro) to the deeply irritating (having to walk miles across a city just to find a Negro water fountain or toilet) to the heart-warming (enjoying the limitless hospitality of a dirt-poor Mississippi Negro farm family—"If you gave us a penny," said the wife, "we'd owe you change."). His narrative, cast in the form of a diary, is spare, clear and concise—quite free of the redundancy which has sometimes marred his novels. He never succumbs to the temptation to inflate his report with generalization and hearsay, but limits himself strictly to what he saw, heard and felt as he traveled through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia in his Negro guise.

Telling, as he does so well, what he *felt* during these six weeks, Griffin, the novelist, adds a dimension to his book that no mere reporter could hope to achieve with even the most impressive array of facts and figures. The whole thing was a shattering experience for him, an ordeal that almost destroyed him emotionally before it was ended. He is quite frank about this. And indeed it is the frankness and personal honesty of the author which raises the book high above the sensational aspect of its conception.

It does, after all, smack of sensation and scandal when a white man uses such dramatic and final means of achieving empathy with the Negro. In a sense, it seems almost perverse to tamper with one's identity in this way, no matter what the motive. This is the kind of thing that George Orwell did in that curious first book of his, *Down and Out in Paris and London,* in which he sought to show the world once and for all what it is like to be poor. But Orwell was not *really* poor in his "down and out" period just as Griffin was not *really* a Negro when he made his journey through the South. In each case, the simple fact somehow dulls the point of the book, reducing the effort essentially to a kind of well-intentioned voyeurism.

John Howard Griffin himself seems aware of these difficulties. In his Preface, he says, "Some whites will say this is not really it. They will say this is the white man's experience as a Negro in the South, not the Negro's." Then, rather than answer it, he brushes it aside: "But this is picayunish and we no longer have time for that."

Has Griffin the right to brush aside such objections? In a sense, I think he has. He earned it when he was hung in effigy in his home town in Texas for publishing this report on his six weeks' journey; he earned it when he and his family were driven from their town—not by the several threats of violence they received, but by their disgust at the behavior of the neighbors they had known there for over thirty years.

Mr. Griffin has also earned the right to be heard—to be read. That much at least he has earned for this strange, pain-filled book.

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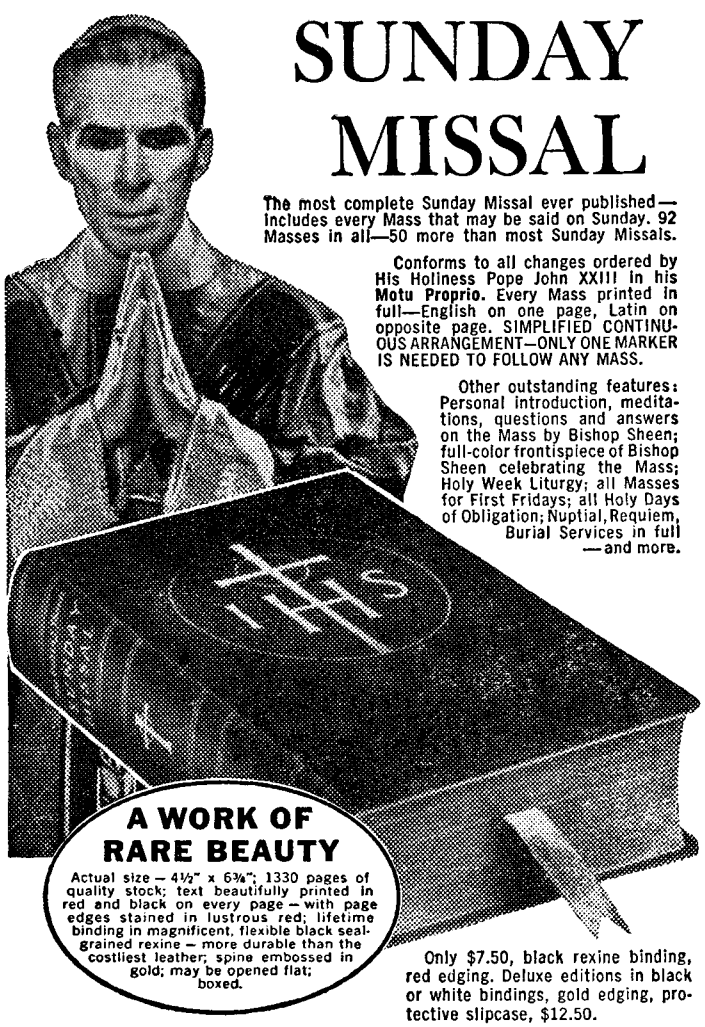

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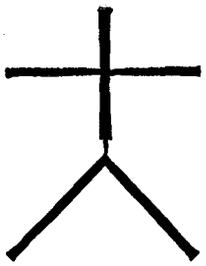

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Perils of Pre-unification Italy

IPPOLITA. By Alberto Denti di Piranjo. Doubleday. $4.95.

By EDWIN KENNEBECK

COLONEL Konrad von Grueber's heart failed him on an Italian road after he had spent a passionate hour with a peasant girl. He had been a coarse, wild, but generous and much-loved man, an Austrian hussar, a Baron; at Waterloo he was given the highest Prussian military honor by Marshal Blücher; his sexual exploits were numerous; his rapport with the people of the Italian duchy where he lived, high-born or low, was genuine and beneficent. At his death, his wife Ippolita wondered if she was the only person in the duchy who did not mourn his loss. To her he was a hot-tempered, profligate, spendthrift monster, "a *fraccurado,* the name by which peasants had always called those Teutons descending from the highlands to sack the country."

Ippolita had first met the Baron when he was carried wounded into her home, in the town of San Lio. She had become infatuated with him, and her widowed mother, a malapropistic old woman, had consented to their marriage. Ippolita returned from the wedding trip in a state of disgust and contempt that was to be her condition for the rest of her life. She hated to see the Baron spend her family's money, though the Raugeos were the richest family in the duchy because Ippolita's great-grandfather, who had risen from serf to overseer under the real Count, had simply usurped the estate when the Count died. Rich by virtue of her ancestor's avarice, she had her title only by virtue of her miscalculated marriage to Konrad (Conrado to the Italians).

So the death of the "Mad Hussar" meant an end to luxurious living at the Villa Raugeo. Ippolita could devote herself to saving every possible piece of land and money—except for one great expense which she was determined to endure: that of securing as her legal son the child that the Baron had sired upon the servant girl at the Gray Head Inn. The girl—fortunately for Ippolita—died in childbirth. The Baroness made the costly trip to Vienna, and through the intervention of Metternich himself the child became hers, and was christened Ippolito.

Alberto Denti di Piranjo's fascinating story, which covers roughly the first half of the nineteenth century, continues with Ippolito's brief life and his mother's bewildered but dogged attempts to hold on to everything—even when it becomes necessary for her secretly to destroy a dead man's will and later to allow a young woman to die during a miscarriage. At the end, although the Austrian Marshal Radetzky had been successful in the north, "revolutions flamed up in every part of Italy, and sovereigns clutching at their tottering thrones fooled themselves into believing that they could hold back the tide

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of destiny. . . ." But Ippolita sees those portents only dimly. Even the death of her Ippolito—the accidental victim of one of those revolutionary efforts—causes her more surprise than sorrow. "Ippolito and Conrado were dead . . . for Ippolita it was as if they had never lived. . . . But the land remained, and the land was hers."

Denti di Piranjo's novel is, according to the jacket, "in the great tradition"—not, obviously, to be classed along with recent Italian "neo-realism." *Ippolita* is not neo-realistic, but realistic. No dates are mentioned outright, but the story reflects the shifts and perils of pre-unification Italy. (*Ippolita* ends about a decade before Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* begins.) And the conflict and irony of Ippolita's life are given their form by her historical situation; she is rich, but not high-born; she is a native of the (unnamed) Italian duchy, but carries the Austrian title of Baroness; her son Ippolito (who is not really hers), schooled in Austria, becomes, like his father, an aide to Ippolita's sovereign.

Around Ippolita circulate her relatives—none of them very dear to her—and the story is alive with the tone of gossip, of family rancor, of personal vanity and aspiration and worry and regret, and with the look and smell of Italian life.

The only important element that does not make itself deeply felt is the passing of time. The long stretch of plot does not evoke "the tears of things." One reason why *Ippolita* lacks the penetrating warmth of *The Leopard* is that it is especially difficult to write a warm novel around a character who loves no one, regrets only the coarseness of her husband and the greed of everyone around her, and has no aspirations except to cling to her possessions. And *Ippolita* cannot claim any particular stylistic intensity or technical precision. In the end, not all the author's humor and irony and compassion can make Ippolita's miserliness enrapture or illuminate the reader. But this is not to say that Ippolita is a cardboard figure; she is alive and kicking, like all the characters, from beginning to end.

Cruelty and Loss of the Algerian War

AN END TO GLORY. By Pierre-Henri Simon. Harper. $3.
FRANCE AND ALGERIA: COMPLEMENTARY ENEMIES. By Germaine Tillion. Knopf. $3.

By ALICE ELLEN MAYHEW

FRANCE'S long, tragic engagement with the Moslem rebellion in Algeria is now going into its eighth year, a war in which the civilian population of Algeria is both the battlefield and the prize. One can not imagine the cruelty of such a war, and its incalculable loss in human life and bitterness for the Algerian peoples. We know now that it will end in victory for the rebels, in independence for Algeria, but it is difficult to see how the suspicions and fears of the two interlocked populations of Algeria (one million "Europeans" and nine million Mos-

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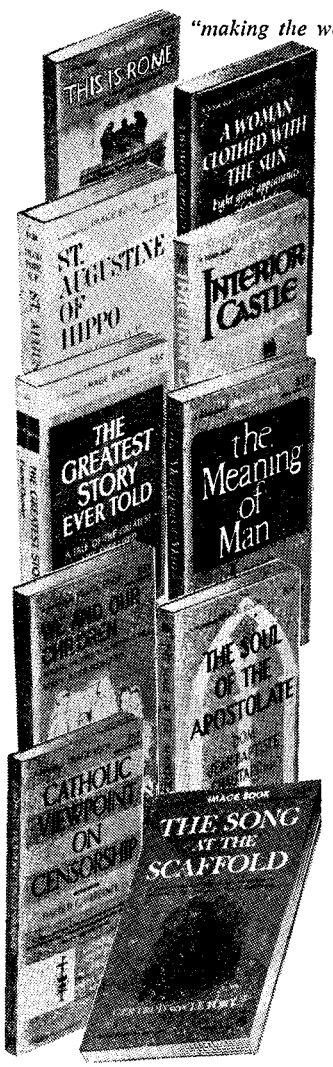
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lems) can ever be erased to permit them to live fruitfully together.

This war, in which both Moslem Arabs and Christian French have resorted to terror and torture, has been a nightmare. It has driven the million "French" of Algeria to desperation, destroyed more than one government, broken the hearts of sensitive, moral Frenchmen, and caused honorable, even heroic, French soldiers to mutiny against the government they mistakenly think to serve and to behave, in some instances, like gangsters and barbarians.

Nothing is more indicative of the horrible contradictions of this war than the excesses and confusions of the French soldiers involved in it, whose feeling have been worked to the pitch of paroxysms by twenty years of frustration and uninterrupted fighting in great moral solitude. Two brilliant books, Germaine Tillion's *France and Algeria,* and *An End to Glory* by Pierre-Henri Simon, now discuss its enigmatic aspects.

An End to Glory, cast in the form of a dialogue between a brilliant French officer and a philosopher, is only loosely speaking a novel. It is a toughly intellectual, brilliantly devised, penetrating analysis of the morality of war and the role of the soldier, of the conflict between the conscience of the individual and the questionable demands of the state and the military. M. Simon is harshly realistic in his judgments of both sides in this conflict, and deeply compassionate, but in the end his hero, who had fought brilliantly in the World War, hard but sadly in the Indochina trap, and with increasing distaste and horror in Algeria, resigns his post and goes back to his country home. This was a professional warrior whose view of soldiering had been chivalrous, whose family had served France for centuries. Now he knows that, whatever his colleagues' view of the truth of this war for the protection of the privileged, a war conducted unscrupulously and by un-Christian means, it can never be his truth.

Madame Tillion also emphasizes in her reports and analyses of the French-Algerian *entente* that indefinite prolongation of the conflict will result in the destruction of every French position; that, even so, such a consideration would be academic only because "The African peoples now flow toward their independence like rivers toward the sea—irresistibly." Her account is also distinguished by its deep compassion. An ethnologist who has lived many years among the Algerian peasants, Madame Tillion recounts the evolution of the F.L.N. from a small secret rebel organization to a legitimate nationalistic movement. France, blowing hot and cold, educated the Moslem leadership which now fights her, but left the country in poverty and ignorance, was alternately indulgent and harsh with the European population which has now also turned against her.

Madame Tillion discusses the vicious cycle of torture, executions and terrorism and recounts her two breathtaking interviews with M. Saadi Yacef (whose name had become synonymous with terror but

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who, before her eyes, wept for the murdered victims of subversive warfare) to try to stop the cycle by getting an accord between France and the F.L.N. She declares, ". . . The only interest of France in Algeria is not to maintain herself there by force, it is to have peace, to have peace there." Fear and confusion have led both sides to excess and the French Army to moral exhaustion and utter confusion of aims and appreciation of its task. "The Army, as yet ill adapted to Algeria, transposed to Africa its bitter Asian experience and invented Communism where there was none, in order to combat it." And yet Madame Tillion subtitles her book *Complementary Enemies,* to emphasize the acute mutual dependence of France and Algeria—economic, social and intellectual. No one can help them but each other.

Both of these short books are invaluable in penetrating the complexities of Algeria and modern colonial war. Both are lucid studies of justice and injustice, of the person in relation to the state and to the common good. Madame Tillion's book attempts an analysis of the entire Algerian conflict; M. Simon's heroic, tortured soldier provides an unforgettable portrait of the soldier who is caught in it.

ART

Futurist Program

EVERYONE knows at least one enemy of modern art, of a certain age, who will dismiss contemporary works wholesale under the title of "Futurism." This is a testimonial to the extraordinary publicity attained before World War I by the shock tactics of the even-more-heard-of-than-seen group of Italian artists of that school. The remark may not be quite as silly as it sounds—for the truth is that Futurism seems to have a little of everything belonging to contemporary art in it, as the soon-to-close exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York attests.

It has a big slice of cubism, a dash of expressionism, a whiff of surrealism, a sprig of divisionism, and traces of Fauvism and Art Nouveau. The basic elements of abstract art, whether in its Constructivist-Mondrian tendency or in its lyrical-Kandinsky development, can be found latent in the work of Futurist artists—the later element being the most prominent perhaps due to the Futurists' overriding celebration of the Frenzy of modern life.

Although it has a little of every-

REVIEWERS

Bette Richart, a poet and critic, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

Bruce A. Cook is a previous contributor of fiction and critical articles.

Edwin Kennebeck, a regular reviewer, is on the staff of a leading New York publishing house.

Alice Ellen Mayhew, who has lived and studied in France, is a frequent contributor.

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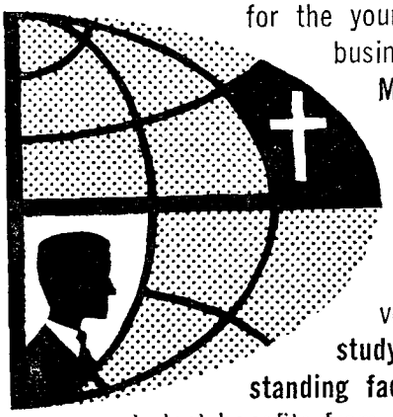

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Books and Ideas

In a sense every issue of The Commonweal is a book issue since each one reflects an abiding interest in contemporary writing. The varied but highly characteristic comment embodied in Commonweal book articles, poems, stage and screen criticism and book reviews tends each week to manifest a warm interest in art and literature.

But in focusing attention on such contemporary expression the magazine does not slight its primary and direct concern with the social, political and religious issues of our day. Rather, this interest in artistic expression and the criticism which it inspires, in conjunction with direct editorial and article comment on public affairs, helps round each number of The Commonweal into a truly meaningful whole.

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thing in it, Futurism is far from being a glorious synthesis of modern tendencies; it is much more interesting historically and theoretically than creatively. Neither is it simply a pot-pourri, for it has an aggressive, didactic idiom of its own, though what it often turns out to look like might be described as a hectic cubism. It is rather sad to read the brave declarations of the Futurist artists' slogans, those declarations that shook the public and achieved a notoriety Madison Avenue might envy: "Burn the Museums!" "Down with the Academies!" etc.

The iconoclasts became new tyrants in a way; one might agree with Aeschylus' Prometheus who remarked of Zeus: ". . . . harsh, like upstarts always." Those painters who proclaimed their liberation then, look today like hidebound dogmatists, and the splendid exhibit given them in New York one could regard as a memorial, since the paintings seem so lifeless. The dynamism of modern life is celebrated, form and color and movement are analyzed etc. but . . . how many works of art breathe a coherent life of their own? It seems like a copybook creativity, as organized, even shackled array of talent, a false Utopia.

Joshua Taylor in his admirable book *Futurism,* published by the Museum of Modern Art in connection with their exhibition, gives an exhaustive account of the artists involved in this movement; in his history and analysis of their activities there is a clue perhaps to the limitations of this school. He says that "even before there was something distinguishable as Futurist painting, the term Futurism had become a commonplace."

The starting gun of the poet Marinetti's writing had set it all off. There is hardly a hen-and-egg problem here; the art was almost entirely made to fit the program. "To realize in paint what they had so confidently set forth in words" was not easy, nor was the liberation they sought achieved by their new set of regulations. In Milan in 1911 the Futurists had their first exhibition, "La Mostra d'Arte Libera,"

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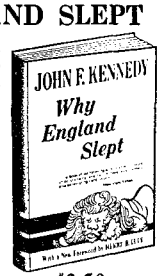

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but sixty years later how unfree this art looks!

In *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* Maritain says that "poetry . . . is the secret life of each and all the arts," and it is the poetry proper to each art that gives it creative conviction. It is only very occasionally in the present comprehensive Futurist exhibition that the poetic essence of a painting saves it from a purely historical or professional interest. Boccioni is the most gifted of the Futurists, but it is in particular his poetic intuition that gives his work a compelling force and creative distinction. His drawings have this quality especially: in "Study for States of Mind: Those Who Stay" through a waterfall of pencil strokes a rhythmical procession of ghostly drooping shapes appear plunged in a country of eternal farewells, it is a complete and eloquent image.

A small 1911 oil entitled *The Riot* has the same kind of conviction, with the orderly upper part of the composition in simple contrast to the tangled conflict in line and color below. His studies for *The City Rises* seem much more admirable than the huge didactic finished product because they are both "freer" and more coherent, caught in the informing shape of poetic intuition.

On the whole the Futurist program, perhaps because of its raw newness, stifled this essential creative élan in its artists; its original startling innovations have been developed within the inner inspiration of painting and sculpture by other artists, fired by more intimate convictions. Rather than a creative synthesis of modern tendencies, the Futurist program seems a brash mechanical statement of new forces that they seized upon to display, instead of using them to create works of art. BETTY KAUFMAN.

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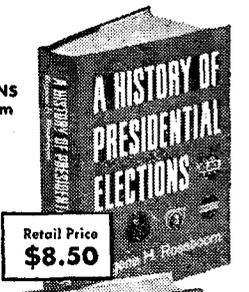

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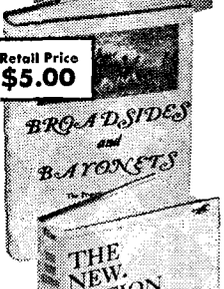

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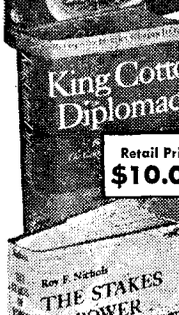

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